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ABSTRACT

The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) program is a new initiative that could affect International Reading Association members in the United States--but will benefit only those who take advantage of it. The purpose of the CSR initiative is to provide financial incentives for schools to develop comprehensive school reforms. Funding is available to state education agencies (SEAs) to provide incentive grants to school districts for schools that elect to pursue CSRs. Each SEA must submit an application for funding, and each school must identify a CSR model or design its own CSR program according to established criteria. The United States Department of Education is reviewing the CSR program to decide how the process should be developed. (RS)

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Improving Public Education Through Comprehensive School Reform: An Issue Brief from the International Reading Association

The Comprehensive School Reform program (CSR) is a new initiative that could affect International Reading Association members in the United States--but will benefit only those who take advantage of it.

This issue brief was created by the Research Division and the Washington Office of the International Reading Association to inform you of the scope and potential of this new program. We hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions or want more information, please contact us at IRAWASH@reading.org.

- Purpose and Programs
- Provisions of Legislation and Distribution of Funds
- Application Procedure and Criteria for Program Funding
- Outlook

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Purpose and Programs

The CSR program is included in the FY 1998 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Act (PL 105-78), which was signed into law on November 13, 1997. The legislation creating the program was sponsored by Congressman David Obey (D-WI), cosponsored by Congressman John Porter (R-IL) and backed by President Clinton.

The purpose of the CSR initiative is to provide financial incentives for schools to develop comprehensive school reforms. These reforms will be based on reliable research and effective practices and will include an emphasis on basic academics and parental involvement, so that all children can meet challenging state content and performance goals. Schools undertaking these extensive, yet well-managed overhauls will have challenging academic standards, competent teachers, and meaningful parental and community support.

Comprehensive school reform gives schools additional tools and effective strategies to become successful in helping all students reach high academic standards. The legislation supports the implementation of effective comprehensive school reform models, including such programs as the following:

Accelerated Schools
ATLAS-Communities
Audrey Cohen College
Coalition of Essential Schools
Community of Learning
CoNECT
Direct Instruction
Expeditionary Learning Outbound
High Schools That Work
Modern Red Schoolhouse
National Alliance for Restructuring Education
New American Schools
Paideia
Roots and Wings

School Development Program
Success for All
Talent Development High School
Urban Learning Center

While no single school improvement plan can be prescribed for every school, legislators believe that more schools should be encouraged to examine successful, externally developed comprehensive school reform approaches that can be adapted in their own communities. Schools are not restricted to using only the approaches identified by the reform models listed above, but are free to develop their own schoolwide reform programs that are based on rigorous research and meet the criteria specified in the legislation.

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Provisions of the Legislation

Funding of $145 million is available in FY 1998 to state education agencies (SEAs) to provide incentive grants to school districts, on a competitive basis, for schools that elect to pursue CSRs. Up to 3,000 schools could receive grants of not less than $50,000. Grants would be renewable for two years. The actual number of schools participating would depend on the cost of the particular reform model chosen or designed by each school.

Distribution of Funds

Of the total appropriation, $120 million is available under the Title I - Demonstrations of Innovative Practices program, and $25 million is available under the fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE). Each SEA will receive a funding allocation, after applying to the Secretary of Education. Title I funds are allocated to SEAs based on the Title I basic grant formula. FIE funds are allocated to SEAs based on each state's relative share of the school-age population. Funds become available to SEAs on July 1, 1998, for a period of one year. However, it is hoped that more money will be appropriated by the Congress on a yearly basis.

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Application Procedure

Each SEA must submit an application for funding. The application must describe the process and selection criteria by which the SEA will make competitive grants to school districts, how the SEA will ensure that only high quality comprehensive school reform programs are funded, how the SEA will disseminate information to school districts and schools, and how the SEA will evaluate results achieved in school districts receiving financial assistance. The SEA must provide assurances that these funds will be used to supplement, not supplant, other federal, state, and local funding.

School district applications must identify which schools within the school district will implement a CSR program, describe the research-based CSR program that will be implemented, describe how the school district will provide technical assistance and support for schools implementing CSRs, and describe how the school district will evaluate schools' results. Schools within a school district must apply for funds under the school district application process.

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Criteria for Program Funding

In order to receive financial assistance, whether eligible under Title I or FIE, each school must identify a CSR model or design its own CSR program according to the following criteria:

a. employs innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and effective practices, and have been replicated successfully in schools with diverse characteristics,

b. has a comprehensive design for effective school functioning that includes instruction, assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management; that aligns the school's curriculum, technology, and professional development into a schoolwide reform plan designed to

enable all students to meet challenging state content and performance standards; and that addresses needs identified through a school needs assessment,

c. provides high quality and continuous teacher and staff professional development and training,

d. has measurable goals for student performance and benchmarks for meeting those goals,

e. is supported by school faculty, administrators and staff,

f. provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning and implementing school improvement activities,

g. utilizes high-quality external technical support and assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity (which may be a university) with experience or expertise in schoolwide reform and improvement,

h. includes a plan for the evaluation of the implementation of school reforms and the student results achieved, and

i. identifies how other resources (federal/state/local/private) available to the school will be utilized to coordinate services to support and sustain the school reform effort.

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Outlook

The U.S. Department of Education is reviewing the CSR program to decide how the process should be developed. It is expected that the application period will be very short; deadlines are likely to follow soon after the procedures are worked out. We will keep you posted.

The CSR initiative is an opportunity for literacy educators to participate in a new program of meaningful reform, but the benefits of this program will not automatically come to you. Information from the U.S. Department of Education and your state department of education will not be issued until later in the year--just before the deadline for application. Be prepared! Talk with other concerned professionals about working together to improve the literacy program in your school.

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